

Module 6

Interview

Techniques

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Interviewer Skills

Interviewing, whether in formal settings or within informal conversations, is a skilled activity. It's something that we get better at with practice. So don't worry if you don't feel very skilled at asking questions to begin with;

You will get better, but getting better requires you to do two things: first, get started even if you don't do it perfectly; and second, once you've begun, notice and attend to the areas where you need to improve.

- Effective questioning

You do have to work at making sure that your questions are clear to your respondent. Sometimes what is obvious to you is less clear to others.

Try out your questions on friends first; do they see what you're getting at?

Also, be careful about asking questions that are too simple; sometimes your respondent might think that you are trying to 'get at something' hidden. But remember that short questions are nearly always better than long, rambling questions that you need to explain.

- Listening skills

This may seem obvious but it is so easy to hear what you want to hear rather than what is actually being said.

In less structured interviews, you need to listen carefully for signs that your respondent might want to say more or that they might want to shift the question a little. There are other times when your respondent will need some encouragement to tell their story.

Listening inevitably involves us in making judgments about what we want or need to hear. This is a skilled practice and one that you can only really learn as you get going and practice.

- Controlling the flow of the interview

As an interviewer, you obviously have your agenda and there are times when you will want to stop your respondents heading off down a 'blind alleyway' or chasing a 'red herring', but there are other times when allowing your respondent to choose what they say will be helpful.

Similarly, there are times when a respondent doesn't seem to answer your question. How do you decide whether to push him to answer or leave him? Being too pushy can spoil the interview. As before, this skill needs practice.

- Evaluating the information

our fourth skill is concerned with assessing what you hear from the candidate. As the interview proceeds you will need to be assessing whether the answers to your questions are producing useful evidence of job suitability, or are superficial and raise doubts about suitability.

You won't always be able to take notes, and listening carefully may often preclude taking them. Noting down what was said as soon as possible is very important.

Types of Interview

here are three common methods of interview:

-structured,

-unstructured

-semi-structured

These are not distinct types of interview, rather, these different types of interview are on a continuum and you will find yourself making quite fine judgments as to whether you want to be more structured or less structured in your interviewing technique.

- Structured Interviews

in a structured interview you will have a set schedule of questions from which you will not deviate. Indeed, at the most structured end of this type of interview, you will detail the very wording of each question.

So for a structured interview you will go through several stages of preparation:

- Work out an overview of what sort of information you want to gather.
- Design the questions that you will want to ask, taking care to make your wording clear.
- Work out the best and most logical order for your questions.
- Look for questions that may puzzle your respondents, lead to digressions or cause you any difficulties.

- Unstructured Interviews

At the opposite end of the structure continuum are completely unstructured interviews.

So how do you go about an unstructured interview? First, you have to provide a hook; a theme or topic that interests your respondent.

For example, it's unlikely that a sales manager would understand why she's being interviewed about the details of factory policy

Second, you'll need to establish a rhythm to your interview. Having introduced the general theme of the interview:

- ask what the key issues are, or what have been the significant events. Then ask for stories that illustrate that issue or event.
- Ask how your respondent would evaluate the current situation or past events, or what they think will happen. Here you are asking for their opinions.
- Or you could ask about their feelings about how a situation or project is progressing.

- Semi-Structure

A semi-structured interview has some of the characteristics of both the structured and unstructured interview.

Having taken a decision to conduct a semi-structured interview, you will plan an overall structure for it.

Where a semi-structured interview differs from a more structured conversation is in the way you give space to your respondent to expand on a particular topic.

To do this you will tend to ask open rather than closed questions, or ask questions that offer your respondent more scope to discuss something that interests them and you are likely to get richer data.

Four Stages of an interview

In a panel interview one member will need to take the chair - this person will then be responsible for initiating, controlling and closing the interview. It is also the role of the chair to link and control the contributions of the panel members.

If you are the chair, you should always introduce the panel members to the candidate and explain how the interview will be conducted. A relaxed and skillful lead interviewer will then continue to establish and maintain rapport throughout the exchange with the candidate.

Click on the links below to read more about the four stages of an interview.

- Introduction

- The Schedule

- A Summary

- The End

- Introduction

In this stage you need to explain what the topic of the interview is and

possibly why you are conducting the interview with that particular person.

You have to be careful at this stage that your introduction doesn't give too much of a steer to your respondent.

Our introduction has to be carefully thought out. It needs to be clear enough to interest your respondent but be careful that it does not become leading, in suggesting the kind of answers that you want.

- The schedule

all interviews will have some sort of schedule of questions. There are differences in how detailed that schedule will be. Sometimes you'll have a carefully worded list of questions. On other occasions you'll have only a list of general topics you want to discuss.

- A Summary

It's often a good idea at the end of the interview to summarize what you have learned from it - indeed, you might do this on a couple of occasions during the interview as well.

At such points you outline what you have understood to have been said. This will give your respondent the opportunity to correct any misunderstandings.

- The End

The end this may sound trivial, but do end by thanking your respondent for giving you their time, and do make sure that you end on time.

If you have said that the interview will only take fifteen minutes or half an hour, then be ready to end at that time - you must be sensitive to the need to end an interview at the convenience of your respondent.

Asking Questions

The way you ask your questions will have a significant effect on the answers you're given. They will be affected by the context, the words you use and your tone.

An example will help make sense of this - Imagine that you ask a senior colleague about a complex issue on her way to a meeting, for which she is already late. Do you think that she'll give the same answer as if you asked her the same question when she's winding down at the end of the week?

How can you make a wise decision about where and when to ask someone your questions?

- Do you have many or only a few (perhaps one) questions to ask?

This is a simple point - if you only have one quick question to ask then obviously it won't be necessary to organize a formal interview. Just seek an appropriate moment to ask your question.

If, however, you have a series of related questions then this will probably need a fixed period of time when you won't be interrupted.

- Does your question require a considered or spontaneous answer?

Some questions will require your respondent to think carefully; perhaps you are asking her to make a judgement or evaluate some piece of information. On the other hand, sometimes you will want a spontaneous answer, one that hasn't been thought about for too long.

Of course, you have to be careful with questions of the latter sort - are you being fair to your respondent in not giving them time to think?

- Does your respondent have time available for an extended conversation or would they appreciate a very brief conversation?

If you have got halfway through a series of questions with a candidate when

you notice them looking at their watch and displaying an increasing desire to be somewhere else, then such a situation does not bode well for the quality of the answers that you'll get!

-Is the answer to your question likely to be of a sensitive or confidential nature?

An extreme example of this would be 'What do you think of Joe's chance of promotion?', just as Joe was standing next to you. Do you think that the answer might be affected by Joe's presence?

- What is your relationship with the respondent?

Are you asking a question of a friend, your boss, a stranger or a subordinate? Each is likely to answer your question differently. Your friend might well try to think what answer would help you. An older, more senior colleague might shape her answer so as to give you advice or she might dismiss the question with a cursory answer. A subordinate might want to please you or be worried about how their answer might affect them.

Types of Questions

The best interviews follow a structured framework in which each applicant is asked the same questions and is scored with a consistent rating process. Having a common set of information about the applicants upon which to compare after all the interviews have been conducted allows hiring managers to avoid prejudices and all interviewees are ensured a fair chance.

Many companies choose to use several rounds of screening with different interviewers to discover additional facets of the applicant's attitude or skill as well as develop a more well-rounded opinion of the applicant from diverse perspectives.

Two common types of questions are asked at interviews: behavioral questions and situational questions.

- Behavioral questions

using behavioral questions, the interviewer asks the applicant to reflect on his or her past experiences. After deciding what skills are needed for the position, the interviewer will ask questions to find out if the candidate possesses these skills. The purpose of behavioral questions is to find links between the job's requirement and how the applicant's experience and past behaviors match those requirements.

Examples of behavioral questions:

Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation. How did you handle the situation?

Give me an example of when you showed initiative and assumed a leadership role?

- Situational interview

A situational interview question requires the applicant to explain how he or she would handle a series of hypothetical situations. Situational-based questions evaluate the applicant's judgment, ability, and knowledge. Before administering this type of interview, it is a good idea for the hiring manager to consider possible responses and develop a scoring key for evaluation purposes.

Examples of situational questions:

you and a colleague are working on a project together; however, your colleague fails to do his agreed portion of the work. What would you do?
A client approaches you and claims that she has not received a payment that supposedly had been sent five days ago from your office. She is very angry. What would you do?

Concluding The Interview

Up to now we have been considering how to control and conduct the main body of an interview. There remains, however, the need to draw it to a satisfactory close. You should remember that, while you are trying to select the best candidate, the candidates are also 'selecting' you. You need to remember that you as an interviewer are being assessed and selected, and you need to ensure your presentational and interpersonal skills are up to the job. Click on the links below to read more about the three steps needed to close out an interview successfully.

- Step 1

Step 1 is to give the candidate the opportunity to tell you about anything that has not been covered, or to expand on anything that has not been adequately covered (for example, a relevant accomplishment that the candidate wants you to know about).

- Step 2

Step 2 is to give the candidate the opportunity to ask you questions in order to clarify any features of the job or the terms and conditions associated with it.

- Step 3

concluding the interview - Only when the candidate has had the opportunity to expand on a topic or ask questions should you begin concluding the interview. It is good practice to summarize any agreements or understandings that may have been reached and to give a clear indication of what is likely to happen next, and when.

Reaching A Decision

Having seen all the candidates, you can now start to pull together your notes and impressions and make a final decision.

It is probably worth allowing a little time to gather your thoughts and/or discuss initial observations with colleagues or the interview panel after every interview so that your memory is not confused.

- Person Specification

The person specification should again play a major role in your final decision. Your questions should have been geared to elicit the necessary information from each applicant to enable you to ascertain their suitability against the agreed criteria.

- Intuition

the planning of the selection process will help you to reach an objective decision, but intuition cannot be completely ignored.

What is important is that you can explain objectively - preferably to colleagues and not just to yourself - the basis of your intuition.

If you feel that one candidate would fit perfectly into your team, what is it - precisely - that gives you that impression?